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Source: *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Apr., 2006), pp. 253-280

Published by: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3877353>

Accessed: 18-09-2016 04:56 UTC

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Peter Thompson

JOHN Askew was probably born in Virginia. He and his wife lived on a tributary of the Pagan River called Reynolds Creek near Cypress Swamp in Isle of Wight County, Virginia (Figure 1). Askew was cantankerous and functionally illiterate. He supported his household by raising hogs and cattle, by undertaking some tanning and carpentry, and allegedly by petty theft. He was accused of stealing corn from the local mill and of killing his neighbors' pigs. Nevertheless in 1663 vestryman Henry Pitt hired Askew to build the church at Pagan Point. Askew and his wife were seldom seen in any church. Their neighbors believed the pair preferred to spend their Sundays profanely by drinking in tippling houses. For Askew building the church offered fresh opportunities for petty theft and peculation. Before long he was charged with stealing lumber supplied to him by Pitt.

Daniel Miles and his kinsman John Brown produced in court testimony sordid details of the Askews' slatternly household. One day in the summer of 1663, Miles visited the Askews to find goodwife Askew "lying on the Bedd like a Beast" and "vomiting in an abundant measure with her child crying and the Mother not able to help." Miles asked the maid who looked after the Askews' cows what was going on. The maid told him that goodwife Askew had taken to bed complaining of a cough. "I think she is drunk," said Miles. The maid agreed, adding that a neighbor's wife had had to guide her home. Miles had already noticed a number of apples around the house and had previously seen goodwife Askew brewing cider. He would later testify that John Askew had ordered one of his indentured servants to "fetch" some apples from Ambrose

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William and Mary Quarterly, 3d Series, Volume LXIII, Number 2, April 2006

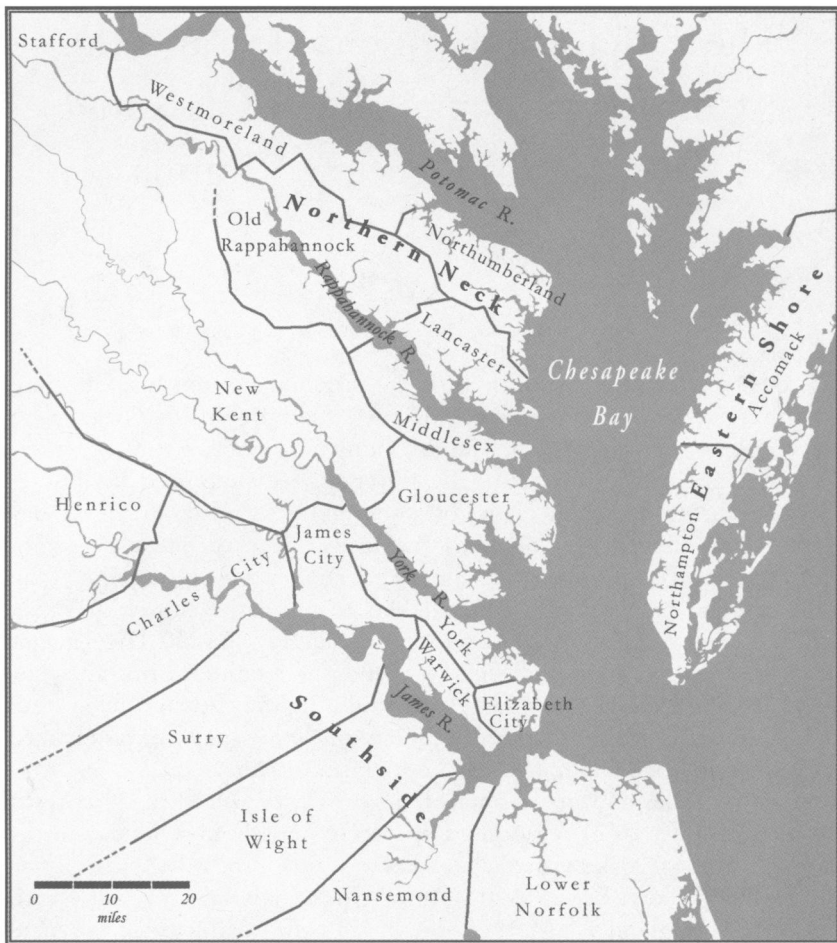


FIGURE I

The boundaries of Virginia's counties in 1676. Adapted from Warren M. Billings, ed., *The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary History of Virginia, 1606–1689* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975), 72. Drawn by Rebecca L. Wrenn. A color version is available on <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/wm/63.2/thompson.html>.

Bennett's orchard and that the servant had returned at night with a full bag. Indentured servants knew the Askew household to be a place where a man could get a drink and a bed with few questions asked. In 1666 John Smyth, a servant of John Peirce's, spent five days on a binge at the Askews', paying for his drink with a piglet that was almost certainly stolen.¹

How should historians describe Askew's social class? He apparently owned land and certainly employed servants but does not fit the ideal type of the yeoman farmer. He dabbled in tanning, cooperage, and building but could not be described as an artisan. Smallholders in seventeenth-century England often combined agricultural production on a modest scale with other forms of manual labor to make ends meet, and many Virginians such as Askew did the same. To describe him as a smallholder, however, would be to overlook the aura of criminality that surrounds the known details of his life. Though there were men in Virginia who would have employed seventeenth-century variants of the epithet white trash to describe Askew, his neighbors did not always act as if they thought he belonged to a marginalized class. In 1670, for example, Nicholas Smyth, a local justice of the peace who must have been as familiar with Askew's character as any man in the neighborhood, purchased four heifers from him. Prior to the purchase, Smyth bound Askew to an agreement that he would "look after the sd cattle and their increase" as faithfully as if they were his own. Such an agreement, which displayed considerable faith in the ability of contracts to channel the pursuit of self-interest toward the creation of stable communities, was predicated on the assumption that Askew would look after the interests of his own household even if he had demonstrated, time and again, that the larger community to which he was presumably bound by ties of neighborliness and sociability could go hang. Householder probably comes closest to capturing Askew's position in the world as he and his contemporaries would have understood it.² Within the context of a growing balance in the colony's ratio of men to women, which in turn produced an increase in that percentage of the population that could expect to marry, the possession of a household was at least as important

¹ This sketch is based on Isle of Wight County Record of Wills, Deeds, Etc., vol. 1 (1662–1715), esp. fols. 7, 14–16, 18, 83, 227–28, Library of Virginia, Richmond. See also Isle of Wight County Deeds, Wills, Guardian's Account Book A, 1636–1767, fols. 75–76, Library of Virginia.

² For the Askew agreement, see Isle of Wight County Record of Wills, Deeds, Etc., vol. 1 (1662–1715), fols. 227–28. John Marshall, who played a prominent role in organizing the petition of grievance discussed in greater detail later in the article, witnessed this agreement between Askew and Smyth. For a discussion of household formation in the early modern Atlantic world, see Allan Kulikoff, *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2000), esp. 32–33.

as the possession of land in defining the most elementary collective consciousness shared by white, male Virginians in the late seventeenth century. Moreover in 1662 Virginia's legislature recognized, by defining white women who worked in and around a household as not tithable, the growing social and political significance of householders. Evidence suggests that around the same time poorer householders began to develop a class consciousness.

In 1677 the neighbor from whom Askew stole apples, Bennett, was party to the production of a document in which a class of householders was defined with greater precision. Bennett was one of nine subscribers to the petition of "the poore yet his Majes[ty's] most Loyall subjects of the Isle of Wight countie," filed at the request of the royal commissioners sent to Virginia to investigate the causes of Bacon's Rebellion. The subscribers' penultimate grievance stated:

Whereas ther are some great persons both in honor [and] rich in Estat and have severall wayes of gaines and profitts [who] are exempted from paying Leavies and the poorest inhabitant being compelled to pay the great taxes which we are burdened with having a hogshead or two of tobacco to pay for rent and near two hundred yearly for Leavies having a wife and two or three children to maintain [they asked] whither our taxes or not the greater by such favour and priviledges granted them which wee desire to be easd of by ther paying of Leavies as well as wee, they having noe necessitie from being so exempted.

By claiming equal treatment from their social superiors on the grounds they had wives and children to protect, poor yet loyal inhabitants of Isle of Wight claimed to be speaking on behalf of a collectivity of householders whose material interests, whether the householders rented or owned land, were injured in various ways, not least by poll taxes. Yet the petition demanded, among its twenty-six grievances, "that evrie man may be taxed according to the tracks of Land they hold."³ Though the petition presumed that relatively poor men with wives and children to protect shared interests and a particular consciousness with wealthier neighbors, it simultaneously distinguished householders who owned land from householders who rented.

³ See "Causes of Discontent in Virginia, 1676," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 2, no. 4 (April 1895): 380–92 (quotations, 380, 390, 388). The petition is also repr., with a subsequent petition rebutting its claims, in John Bennett Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight County Virginia* . . . (Baltimore, 1973), 150–58. Ambrose Bennett is identified as a subscriber to the petition in court records repr. in "Isle of Wight County: Papers Relating to Bacon's Rebellion," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st ser., 4, no. 2 (October 1895): 111–12.

The Janus-faced quality of the Isle of Wight petition, with its recognition of fundamental social distinctions in a document purporting to speak on behalf of a unified class of poor yet loyal householders, is largely attributable to the differing material interests of its signatories. Like their contemporaries, the Isle of Wight petitioners defined social classes and understood relationships between them in ways that seem, to readers familiar with the more rigorous definition of class identities in an industrializing world, so imprecise as to be of little analytic value. In general terms second- and third-generation Virginians developed, often from tropes of oppression in the first instance, several overlapping frameworks in which they made sense of social relations and of their place in a social order. Poll taxes and the need to make a living encouraged Virginians to picture the pursuit of self-interest by a roiling mass of individuals as the determinant of (imperfect) social relations. Postrebellion petitions of grievance attributed the colony's problems to corrupt and immoral individuals (and justified rebellion against them), but they also softened this picture of a dog-eat-dog world by treating the colony as a collection of households unified, at least temporarily, by the need to protect wives and children from Indian attacks and capable, through contracts such as Smyth's with Askew, of forming harmonious communities on a local, if not colonial, scale. Within this framework the poor yet loyal householder belonged to a discernible class capable of offering a moral critique of the pursuit of advancement by corrupt, immoral, or antisocial individuals.

Finally, Virginians invoked the language of commonalty. The first of three petitions submitted by Nansemond County after Bacon's Rebellion stated that the "rising" in that part of Virginia was occasioned by "grievous taxations" that threatened the "utter ruin of us the poor commonalty." The language of commonalty employed here and in other documents produced during and after the rebellion had deep roots in the political culture of early modern England. As used by Virginians, commonalty referred to the actual common people of the colony, often but not always figured as a distinct social and political estate oppressed by corrupt or immoral great planters, and also served as a near synonym for commonwealth, referring to localized polities in which householders were bound together in an organic commonweal. In the Nansemond petition and in others filed by residents of the southside, Eastern Shore, and Northern Neck, Virginians conjured alternative and idealized social hierarchies, often based explicitly on local communities, and brought together an understanding of material interests, most noticeably landownership, with a discussion of political rights, most obviously in respect of taxation policy. The Isle of Wight petitioners, for example,

insisted that they possessed rights, characterized the exemptions or liberties granted to privileged men rich in honor and estate as immoral, and, at the same time, accepted that under an equitable system of governance poor yet loyal and upstanding citizens such as themselves would possess obligations to a social order in which some men would be rich and some poor. Wealthier subscribers to the Isle of Wight petition, including Bennett, must have been aware that they might pay more, not less, tax if landholding was the criterion of assessment. Implicit in calls for the abolition of poll taxes was a vision of social relations in which the possession of rights originating in landownership yet buttressed by claims to moral authority by householders who were neither rich nor poor would underpin the creation of a hierarchical social order made tolerable for its members by its inherent justice. Even men who vehemently denied that the possession of a household and property conferred political rights tacitly accepted the appeal of a social hierarchy shaped along these lines. At the height of Bacon's Rebellion, Berkeley loyalist Nicholas Spenser pictured the colony as at the mercy of the "Rabble," in his opinion a majority of Virginia's population, since the colony was nothing more than "a sink to draine England of her filth and scum." He nonetheless hoped the "better sort" of that "trash" that had set Nathaniel Bacon up would now pull him down.⁴

The better sort of trash, the poor yet loyal householder, the commonalty: there are trace elements of intriguing class consciousness in these terms that described identities shaped by the political and economic history of Virginia yet also inspired collective expression and struggle. The relationship between languages of collective expression (symbolized by the figure of the poor yet loyal householder) and languages of hierarchy (rooted in the idea that by acquiring land and a family a man also came into the possession of rights and obligations) was shaped by the particular history of seventeenth-century Virginia and, significantly, by Bacon's Rebellion.

Would men such as Askew, Smyth, and Bennett have regarded themselves as members of a single class of poor yet loyal householders oppressed by rapacious grandees, or would Smyth and Bennett have set themselves apart from both Askew and their oppressors as members of a distinct class, albeit one with obligations toward the commonalty? Such questions move the study of social relations in seventeenth-century Virginia away from the creation and operation of master-servant or

⁴ Copy of "Nansemond County's Grievances made by Samuel Wiseman," in Colonial Office Papers, C.O. 1/39 fol. 246, National Archives, Kew, Eng.; Nicholas Spenser to Sir Henry Coventry, Aug. 6, 1676, in Coventry Papers, fol. 170, Longleat House, Wiltshire, Eng., accessed on microfilm (vol. 77, reel 16); Spenser to "your Lordships," Aug. 7, 1676, *ibid.*, fol. 169.

master-slave polarities and toward issues more commonly encountered in studies of class consciousness and struggle in the industrializing world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The most successful historical analyses of class consciousness and class struggle in this latter period, however, marshal variables that, insofar as they existed at all in seventeenth-century Virginia, resist systematic analysis. These texts analyze precisely defined and relatively confined spaces: life aboard ship, in a workshop, factory, or colliery, among the inhabitants of a walking city, or in a village devastated by enclosure. Such locales are, in turn, generally studied within the confines of a single nation-state, an emerging nation-state, or in colonies reacting to a sharp application of imperial authority by a nation-state. Seventeenth-century Virginia had only one town worth the name, and that was razed by Bacon's army. Isle of Wight County, like most of the colony, was "seate[d]" in what a contemporary described as a "stragling distracted Condision," its residents dispersed among swamps and along creeks. By any objective standards, Virginia was lightly governed by England during the sixty-year period when it was the only Crown colony on the American mainland. The one immutable theme of imperial governance—that the organization of the tobacco trade should favor British interests—produced a powerful collective consciousness, which led tobacco-planting Virginians to picture themselves as the "slaves" of English tobacco merchants.⁵ Most Virginians

⁵ On the settlement of Virginia, see Letter from Anthony Langston, [1663?], in Egerton ms. 2395, fols. 366–67 (quotation, fol. 366), British Library, London, repr. in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2d ser., 1, no. 2 (April 1921): 100–106 (quotation, 101). See also [Francis Makemie], "A Plain and Friendly Perswasive to the Inhabitants of Virginia and Maryland for Promoting Towns and Cohabitation," *VMHB* 4, no. 3 (January 1897): 255–71 (quotation, 260). That Virginia tobacco planters were slaves of English merchants was insinuated in "Suggestions for the Enlargement of the Tobacco Trade," [1656?], Rawlinson ms. A38, fol. 703, Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Eng. In 1651 Sir William Berkeley urged Virginia's Council and House of Burgesses to resist the first Navigation Act on the grounds that "we are more slaves by nature, then their power can make us if we suffer our selves to be shaken with these paper bullets" (see "Speech of Sir Wm. Berkeley, and Declaration of the Assembly, March, 1651," *VMHB* 1, no. 1 [July 1893]: 76). The governor, council, and assembly of Virginia made one of the earliest uses of the metaphor when, in 1623, they urged James I to rescind the Virginia Company of London's charter on the grounds that they had been subjected to "Egyptian slavery and Scythian cruelty" through Sir Thomas Smith and Alderman Johnson's exploitation of the monopoly privileges granted the company's "Magazine" and the attempted suppression of independent trade (see "The Governor, Council, and Assembly of Virginia to the King, February 20, 1623," in *Calendar of State Papers: Colonial Series, 1574–1660*, ed. W. Noël Sainsbury [London, 1860], 1: 39). An anonymous author described Virginia's tobacco planters as "the most beneficial Slaves that pay Obedience to the Crown of England" (see *An Essay Upon the Government of the English Plantations on the Continent of America* [1701], ed. Louis B. Wright [San Marino, Calif., 1945], 44). That "the English" had conspired to keep Virginia in a

were not tobacco magnates and identified local injustices rather than imperial legislation and governance as the source of their potential or actual oppression. Intriguingly, the characterizations that captured the social imagination of poorer Virginians and their observers after the Restoration—the poor yet loyal householder, the commonalty, or “that hidra the vulgar”—were suffused with agency rather than dependency.⁶ It is important to consider why, and with what effect, they were.

The extent to which white Virginians of all ranks were haunted by the specter of helpless dependency (on a worthless crop, on a corrupt colonial government and unjust tax system, or on rapacious neighbors and cruel masters) may explain the ease with which they could be persuaded into a redemptive war of extermination against local Indians or of plunder against their neighbors during Bacon's Rebellion. In addition the speed with which Virginians on both sides decided during the rebellion to get their retaliation in first, on the assumption that they had to plunder or they would themselves be plundered by white neighbors, suggests the enduring strength of an adversarial view of social relations within the colony. Even the most apocalyptic descriptions of the impending collapse of social order during Bacon's Rebellion, however, offer testimony to the extent to which Virginians by 1676 had come to identify the household as the manifestation and the guarantor of property and liberty. Berkeley loyalists had no doubt that Nathaniel Bacon's followers intended to assume all legislative and judicial power as a prelude to “shareing . . . among them selves” the estates of those they dubbed “Traytors to the Cominality,” thereby depriving loyal men of their liberty and property. Equally, when Sir William Berkeley raised an army of his own, Sarah Drummond told her daughter and son-in-law that Berkeley had declared he would “kill [every] man woman & child, & give away what they had.” She spread it about that Berkeley's army of “200 Accomack river English & 500 Indians” had been promised “free plunder” and that rebel and neutral alike would be made “slaves, man woman & child” if they did not agree to Berkeley's terms. From the late summer of 1676, each side offered freedom to its opponent's slaves and indentured servants on condition that they took up arms against their former masters, fueling predictions of impending anarchy.⁷ Families

state of underdevelopment and subordination was a prominent theme in Robert Beverley's 1705 history of Virginia (see Beverley, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, ed. Louis B. Wright [Chapel Hill, N.C., 1947]).

⁶ “Defense of Colonel Edward Hill,” *VMHB* 3, no. 3 (January 1896): 239–52 (quotation, 239), *VMHB* 3, no. 4 (April 1896): 341–49, *VMHB* 4, no. 1 (July 1896): 1–15.

⁷ “Virginia's Deplored Condition,” *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 4th ser., 9 (1871): 175; “Philip Ludwell's Account,” *VMHB* 1, no. 2 (October

being slaughtered or enslaved, servants and slaves overthrowing the patriarchal authority of masters: these nightmarish visions reflect the extent to which households rather than individuals had become a fundamental unit of analysis in the colony's social and political thought.

It was not always so. As news of appalling conditions in Virginia filtered back to England, colonial theorists moved away from models in which draining "the fennes of a state politique" by putting England's "idle" inhabitants to gainful labor in the colonies would benefit the English nation and might eventually be good for the very "excrements" of England's "full and swelling State." Gradually, the success of the colonial project came to be measured not only by the health of the English nation but also, crucially, by the ability of the transplanted and transformed drone to, as Richard Ligon put it, "sit and eate the Honey of his owne Hive."⁸

Unless they were content to picture themselves as employees in a company store or inmates of a glorified prison, white Virginians had to believe that their colony existed to increase or, at the very least, maintain an individual's property and independence. Faith in the possibility of upward social mobility for the common man became the colony's civil religion, adumbrated in countless letters, pamphlets, and memoranda. In 1649, for example, William Bullock argued that the common plowman, who in England labored and sweated all the days of his life only to end them in sorrow, would, after four or five years in Virginia, place himself in a condition "never again to want" and to "live like Gentlemen." Bullock also commented favorably on the prospects for

1893): 174–86 (quotation, 183); Herbert R. Paschal, ed., "George Bancroft's 'Lost Notes' on the General Court Records of Seventeenth-Century Virginia," *VMHB* 91, no. 3 (July 1983): 348–62 (quotation, 358). See also William Berkeley to Sir Henry Coventry, June 3, 1676, Coventry Papers, fol. 103 (vol. 77, reel 16); Philip Ludwell to Thomas Ludwell, June 12, 1676, *ibid.*, fol. 120; "Bacon's Rebellion: William Sherwood's Account," *VMHB* 1, no. 2 (October 1893): 167–74; [Anonymous], "The History of Bacon's and Ingram's Rebellion, 1676" in *Narratives of the Insurrections, 1675–1690*, ed. Charles M. Andrews (New York, 1915), 65; Stephen Saunders Webb, 1676: *The End of American Independence* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1995).

⁸ For "the fennes of a state politique," see Councell of Virginia, *A true declaration of the estate of the colonie in Virginia . . .*, in David B. Quinn, ed., *New American World: A Documentary History of North America to 1612*, vol. 5, *The Extension of Settlement in Florida, Virginia, and the Spanish Southwest* (New York, 1979), 248–62 (quotation, 249). For the "excrements" of England, see William Crashaw, "A Sermon Preached in London before the Right Honourable Lord la warre, Lord governor and Captaine Generall of Virginia," in Sigmund Diamond, "From Organization to Society: Virginia in the Seventeenth Century," in *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development*, ed. Stanley N. Katz (Boston, 1976), 15. For Richard Ligon's quotation, see Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "The Beehive as a Model for Colonial Design," in *America in European Consciousness, 1493–1750* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1995), 272–92 (quotation, 287).

advantageous marriages that Virginia afforded Englishwomen. Edward Williams argued in 1650 that “in Virginia the meanest servant (if he have any spirit) is still in expectation of improving his condition, and without any presumption may cherish his hopes, which promise him (his time expired) a present happinesse and future possibility of a Fortune equall, if not outgoing his Master.”⁹

Yet where English writers such as Bullock and Williams celebrated the perceived opportunities for upward social mobility in the colony, Virginians, or English residents of the colony, paid at least as much attention to the need to control and limit the social and political consequences of social mobility. In this context the household, and its potential links to wider polities, became a subject of contestation, as it had been in early modern England. For poorer Virginians acquiring a household was a visible manifestation of their possession of a competency, and their claim to the rights implied by the possession of land or a trade was buttressed by the need to support a family. For wealthier Virginians, particularly those who employed servants or owned slaves, the household was a site of discipline and one of the foundations of a patriarchal society. During the first and much of the second generation of settlement, high rates of mortality and the population's gender imbalance retarded household formation and frustrated patriarchal aspirations.¹⁰ But even when there were fewer householders and more rootless laborers than writers on the condition of Virginia would have liked, the regulation of labor within households forced wealthier Virginians to implicitly, and frequently explicitly, mediate their notions of social hierarchy by reference to normative assumptions concerning justice and obedience, thereby creating such crude social categories as the good master, the better sort of trash, and the rebellious servant.

In 1661, for example, William Clutton of York County alleged that indentured servants whose time belonged to Thomas Beale, a local magistrate and substantial planter, were receiving inadequate provisions.

⁹ William Bullock, *Virginia Impartially examined, and left to publick view, to be considered by all [j]udicious and honest men . . .* (London, 1649), 44. See also Peter Thompson, “William Bullock's ‘Strange Adventure’: A Plan to Transform Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 61, no. 1 (January 2004): 107–28. [Edward Williams], *Virginia's Discovery of Silke-Wormes, with their benefit* (London, 1650), 32.

¹⁰ One manifestation of these aspirations was a law enacted in 1646 requiring parents “whose poverty extends not to give them breeding” to allow their children to be bound out to husbandmen and tradesmen and empowering county commissioners to send selected children to learn carding, knitting, and spinning at a public flax house. There was, however, limited support within the colony as a whole for social engineering on this scale (see William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia . . .* [Richmond, Va., 1809], 1: 336).

Clutton, who had himself served a term of indenture, probably for Beale, believed servants were entitled to eat meat three times a week. During his servitude, when his master attempted to fob Clutton off with short measures of bread and cheese, he sent them back; his last year of service was "harder then any of ye other." On completion of his term, Clutton refused employment as Beale's overseer, citing his parsimony. Beale countered that by remonstrating with him Clutton had encouraged Beale's servants to mutiny. They refused to obey Beale's overseer and one of them, Isaac Friend, who became their "captaine gen[eral]," set about planning the redress of their "hard usage" and "corne & water" provisions. Friend planned to petition the king and, if that did not work, to seize arms and gather those "who would be for Liberty, and free from bondage," killing all who opposed them. Clutton was charged with "uttering" and speaking "mutinous & seditious words tending to ye tumultuous and dangerous behaviour of severall servants." His punishment was relatively light: he was ordered to post a bond for his future good behavior. Court proceedings suggest that Beale's peers believed Clutton's allegations were justified. Clutton appealed successfully to be discharged from the bond when "several persons" declared in court that he was "a very honest civill person." Records do not delineate what punishment Friend received, though the court proceedings suggest that he had been consigned to the motley ranks of that vulgar hydra so feared by wealthy patriarchs.¹¹

In post-Restoration Virginia, as rates of mortality declined and the number of women in the colony increased, little commonwealths, or family units of production, became more common than they had been at any time previously, and Virginia's taxpayers were increasingly likely to be married. The very factors that restricted access to marriage in the third generation of settlement, chief among them a growing scarcity of land, only heightened the potential political power of the poor to middling laborer who had managed to acquire a household. Observers of the condition of Virginia began to play with the notion that the better sort of trash, men such as honest and civil Clutton, could be bound, through economic diversification and reform of the tax system, to a social hierarchy that allowed individual advancement within a stable political order. Berkeley's comprehensive plan for economic diversification, "A Discourse and View of Virginia," assumed that establishing a flax or silk industry or building towns would create a distinction between landless servants, non-tobacco-producing freemen, and greater planters that would make the colony more governable. As Berkeley was preparing his

¹¹ "Proceedings in York County Court," *WMQ*, 1st ser., II, no. 1 (July 1902): 34-37 (quotation, 34).

"Discourse and View," Virginia's House of Burgesses enacted legislation that acknowledged the fundamental demographic change that was transforming social relations within the colony. From 1662 white women, whether indentured or not, were considered tithable if they worked in the tobacco fields but not tithable if they worked in and around the household.¹²

This legislative innovation was not entirely altruistic. It was partly designed to reduce tobacco production and partly to stamp out tax evasion caused by "diverse masters" concealing their women servants. Burgesses must have felt pressure from poorer householders, though, to further extend relief through a fundamental reform of the tax system. In 1663 the burgesses "unanimously" concluded that the "most equal" way of paying taxes was through a levy on land "and not upon heads." The resolution was not acted on, most likely for the reason identified by the authors of a petition received in London in June 1676: opposition from landed men. The burgesses had been down this road before. In 1645 the House, finding poll taxes "inconvenient" and, for the poor, "insupportable," had proposed taxing landholdings. The schedule they suggested was less progressive than it might have been: a taxpayer would have paid the same sum—four pounds of tobacco for one hundred acres of land—as for a breeding sheep. In any case the census on which the proposal depended was never conducted. Meanwhile measures supported by great planters, such as schemes to raise tobacco prices by limiting production, exacerbated the injurious effect of poll taxes on poor householders. In 1668 the burgesses informed Berkeley and the council that a scheme to limit the number of tobacco plants each poll could cultivate had led men to wring as much tobacco as possible from their quota and was threatening to create a class of men condemned to perpetual poverty by the need to exploit their land to the point of exhaustion to meet tax and levy bills. From 1675 Virginians used the threat of being "Sneakingly murder'd . . . in our beds" during an Indian attack to press the point again. In May or June 1676, a person or people other than Bacon produced a statement titled "Considerations Upon the Present Troubles in Virginia." This document argued, in language that was repeated almost verbatim in several postrebellion petitions of grievance, that "the Great Oppression the people complain of is the great taxes levied on them" and the unequal way of raising them "by the Poll so that a poor man that hath nothing to maintain himself, wife and child pays as much for his Levies as he that hath 2,000 acres of land."¹³

¹² Anthony S. Parent Jr., *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660–1740* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003), 37; Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 2: 170; Sir William Berkeley, "A Discourse and View of Virginia (1663)," in Egerton ms. 2395, fols. 354–57, British Library.

¹³ On attempts by masters to "conceal" tithable women, see Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 2: 187, 204. On opposition to land taxes, see C.O. 1/36, fol. 112; "Grievances

But by 1675 poorer Virginians were spinning from the topos of the householder threatened by Indian attack a much broader discussion of their rights and obligations, in the process defining yet more precisely a class identity. In the spring of 1676, the author or authors of "The Virginians Plea" argued that "the law of Nature and Nations" now justified extralegal action against Indians and spoke of the "Christian Charity and the *Common Weal*" that obliged them to "Joyne heart and hand most unanimously as one man." After the rebellion the inhabitants of Charles City County made the same point, arguing that the "laws of God and nature" had justified them in taking up arms to defend "ourselves, wives and children and this his maties Country agts ye Indians." At the same time, the inhabitants of Henrico County remonstrated against the injurious taxation levied in their county by men of consanguinity and demanded that no county tax or levy be raised without at least "six of the Comonalty" being witness to the discussion. The commissioners noted that the likely consequence of meeting this demand would be that no levies would ever be raised yet thought it "reasonable" that levies be made in open court. What is striking about this exchange is not the commissioners' response but the petitioners' assumption that the scheme was workable. The proposal assumed that within Henrico County (whose inhabitants elected Bacon to the House of Burgesses in 1676) resided householders who, acting as "solid citizens," would, in return for representation, legislate if necessary against their economic interests. Inhabitants of Isle of Wight County made similar claims on behalf of the poor yet loyal householder. The inhabitants of Northampton County on the Eastern Shore complained that households were oppressed by inaccurately maintained lists of tithables and went on to denounce engrossment as a "great prjudice" to the "communtry" and

of Warwick County and Commissioners' Comments," Apr. 28, 1677, in C.O. 1/39, fol. 221. For previous attempts to replace poll taxes with land taxes, see Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 1: 305. In 1658 the two-shilling-per-hogshead tax on tobacco shipped from Virginia was similarly justified by reference to the regressive nature of poll taxes (see Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 1: 491). For the 1668 proposal to limit tobacco planting, see H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1659/60–1693* (Richmond, Va., 1914), 53–54. For the threat of murder, see "The Virginians Plea for Opposing the Indians without the Governour's Order," in Egerton ms. 2395, fol. 545, British Library. "Considerations Upon the Present Troubles in Virginia," Apr. 28, 1676, in C.O. 1/36, fol. 113. For an example of the replication of the phraseology of "Considerations Upon the Present Troubles" in postrebellion petitions, see petition filed by Isle of Wight County, *VMHB* 2: 380–82. In August 1676 Governor Berkeley indirectly acknowledged the force of this grievance. Needing to raise an army, he offered any man who would join him a twenty-one-year exemption from all taxes and levies, save those due the church, and a share of the plunder to be raised through the confiscation of rebels' estates (see Anonymous, "History of Bacon's and Ingram's Rebellion," 65).

to propose self-denying ordinances such as a suppression of tippling houses and an act preventing men from buying more goods than their crops were worth.¹⁴ In the latter proposal historians again see a conception of the common good in which every man ought to have a chance to buy goods from the ships that infrequently visited the Eastern Shore conjoined with the recognition that some men, because they were richer, would and should be able to buy more than others.

By suggesting that any man possessed of "English blood" would wish to protect his wife, children, and property from Indians, Virginians of both sexes also developed a constitutional discussion of the imperial relationship and the structure of power within the colony. "The humble appeal of ye Volunteers to all well-minded and Charitable men" spoke of Virginians being involved in a fight for both their lives and their liberties. Such formulations unavoidably linked the Virginia householder living thousands of miles from Whitehall, and vulnerable precisely because he was isolated, to an imperial system. For example the "Volunteers" viewed attacks by Indians as acts of violence against the Crown and asked whether their "general avertions" to all Indians was not clear evidence of their goodwill toward "his Majesty's colony." Apparently, Virginians never explained precisely how a war of extermination might serve the interests of the Crown. The volunteers argued that since "his Majesty hath been possesst of this part of America" his territories had been repeatedly invaded and "claimed" by savage Indians who, by so doing, offered "violences" to "our Sovereign."¹⁵ Behind such constitutional rhetoric was the assumption that a war of extermination would ultimately cut public expenditure, eliminate potential sources of corruption and rebellion, and free up land for settlement and royal grants, thereby restoring harmony to white society.

Though he exploited the anger and assertiveness of poorer householders, Bacon spun paternalism from the threat to English households,

¹⁴ On the participation of women in Bacon's Rebellion, see Terri L. Snyder, *Brabbling Women: Disorderly Speech and the Law in Early Virginia* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2003). For "the law of Nature," see "The Virginians Plea for Opposing the Indians without the Governour's Order," in Egerton ms. 2395, fol. 545, British Library; "Charles City County Grievances, 1676," *VMHB* 3, no. 2 (October 1895): 137–38. For the proposal to determine levies in open court, see "Grievances of Henrico County with Commentary from the Commissioners," Mar. 20, 1677, in C.O. 1/39, fol. 239 [emphasis added]. For proposals made by residents of Northampton County, see *VMHB* 2: 289–92 (quotations, 292).

¹⁵ For the reference to "English blood," see "The Virginians Plea for Opposing the Indians without the Governour's Order," in Egerton ms. 2395, fol. 545, British Library; "The humble appeal of ye Volunteers to all well-minded and Charitable men," n.d., *ibid.*

thinking it his “duty” to protect “ye lives and fortunes of ye poor inhabitants” of the frontier “wretchedly sacrificed” by Berkeley’s policies. He even argued that he was doing Berkeley a favor by leading the common people against the Indians rather than against wealthy planters. In contrast “A Declaration of Ye People agt Sr. Wm. Berkeley,” over the signature “Nathaniel Bacon, General by consent of the people,” implies that the aspirations welling up from the movement Bacon nominally led were far more radical than those its titular leader suggested. The “Declaration” was couched in the second-person plural voice of the “commons of Virginia” and, though it reflected Bacon’s views on leadership and corruption, was suffused with the concerns of his grassroots support. The stated purpose of the “Declaration” was to brand Berkeley and twenty other “wicked & pernicious Counsellors and Confederates” as men who had “violated” His Majesty’s interest in Virginia while acting “agt. ye Comonality in these our Civill Comotions.” More specifically, Berkeley and his confederates were charged with “having upon specious pretences of publike works raised greate unjust taxes upon the Comonality for ye advancement of private favourites & other sinister ends.” Berkeley and his cabal were given four days to turn themselves in. Thereafter they would be considered “traitors to the people,” and their personal possessions and estates, along with those of any man who attempted to aid or shelter them, would be liable to seizure. “This,” the “Declaration” stated, “we the Comons of Virga. doe declare, desiring a firme union amongst our selves that we may jointly & with one accord defend our selves agt. the common Enimy.”¹⁶ At roughly the same time, a letter presumed to have been written by Bacon dismissed the possibility that the

¹⁶ “Mr. Bacon’s Acct of Their Troubles in Virginia by ye Indians, June ye 18th, 1676,” *WMQ*, 1st ser., 9, no. 1 (July 1900): 7. For the concerns expressed by Bacon’s grassroots supporters, see “A Declaration of ye People agt Sr. Wm. Berkeley,” in Egerton ms. 2395, fol. 548, and variant copy “A Declaration of the people of Virginia,” add. ms. 4159, fol. 177, British Library. The declaration is repr. in *VMHB* 1: 59 and in “Copy of Mr Bacons Declaracon in Ye Name of Ye People July 30th 1676,” *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 9: 184–87. Citations to the declaration in the main text are taken from this copy. I discuss whether the documents that posterity has ascribed to Bacon were in fact written by him in my forthcoming book on Bacon’s Rebellion. Colonel Edward Hill (a self-interested witness) believed Bacon’s speeches and proclamations were written for him by Thomas Blayton of Charles City. Blayton was known to contemporaries as Bacon’s “great engin.” Blayton’s biographer, Daphne Gentry, concludes that he “probably drafted parts of one or both of the declarations” (Gentry, “Blayton, Thomas,” *Dictionary of Virginia Biography* [Richmond, Va., 2001], 2: 24–25 [quotation, 24]). See “Defense of Colonel Edward Hill,” *VMHB* 3, no. 3 (January 1896): 249. Even if Bacon was the sole author of the documents customarily ascribed to him, he was nonetheless under pressure to acknowledge the concerns of his supporters and to present himself as united with them in a common cause.

common people of Virginia could receive redress through the colony's existing political structure and asked an English correspondent to consider "the nature and quality of the men in power, not onely the Sponges of the Comonalty as to their education, extraction and learning [but also] as to reputation of honour and honesty." The quality and nature of the men in power were of greater interest to Bacon than the structure of power itself. The oath of loyalty to their general that Bacon's followers signed in August 1676 bound them to identify and detain evil and corrupt followers of Berkeley only until such time as the king and his councillors had been informed of the rebels' grievances.¹⁷

Repeated references to the commonalty or commons in documents produced by Bacon's followers, however, suggest an amorphous group of poor and middling householders had begun to conceive of itself as a discrete social class with distinctive rights and just grievances. By aggregating poor yet loyal householders into the broader categories of the commons or the commonalty, Virginians moved beyond the perceived threat to individual households from unjust taxes, scarcity of land, Indian attack, and the depredations of parasitical governors to press demands redolent of an emerging class consciousness.

The language of commonalty, deeply rooted in medieval and early modern English thought, tended to treat John Askew, apple thief, on terms of near equality with Ambrose Bennett, orchard owner, and played down distinctions such as those between landowners and renters. Virginians who felt themselves to be members of the commonalty also felt themselves to be members of a group defined by injustice and oppression, possessed of time-honored rights of protest and appeal, and bound together by an organic conception of social relations encapsulated in the notion of the commonweal. Whereas in its Virginia usage commonalty recognized the existence of material distinctions, it was a concept that described something more akin to an estate of the realm

¹⁷ "A Copy of a Letter Supposed to be Bacon's," n.d., in Coventry Papers, fol. 442 (vol. 77, reel 16). The undated and unsigned letter rehearses arguments made elsewhere and uses imagery (for example "sponges") also present in documents attributed to Bacon. Its rhetorical tone, however, is far more reasonable and its arguments are expressed more coherently than in any document customarily ascribed to him. Bacon was an educated man and may well have been the master of more than one rhetorical style. The differences in tone between the letter, on the one hand, and the "Declaration" and "Manifesto," on the other, as well as the use of the second-person plural voice in both, suggest that competing viewpoints were balanced in the rebellion's key documents. See *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 9: 184–87. For Bacon's Manifesto, see Warren M. Billings, ed., *The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary History of Virginia, 1606–1689* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975), 277–79.

than a social class in the Marxist sense. This language has been overlooked, partly because it does not seem to have been employed in other colonies and, in any case, apparently did not survive into eighteenth-century Virginia. Nonetheless it served as the springboard for political and social demands that recognized the existence of distinct material interests and that, therefore, seem congruent with theories of class formation and struggle grounded in the industrializing world.

Inherent, for example, in Northampton County's understanding of the good of the community was the assumption that, though no man should purchase more goods than he could afford, some men, being richer than their neighbors, could purchase more than others and should be allowed to do so. In language of this kind, householders possessed distinctive rights defined by their stake in society (though justified by reference to moral economies), in which privileges (including freedom from unjust taxation) would be balanced by obligations (the landed would pay more tax than renters). This language was consistent with and, indeed, supported a social order in which servants, renters, householders, and magnates knew their respective places and could act on their rights in ways that seem, to modern eyes, conservative or even illiberal. The same petitioners who appealed to the rights of the commons supported a war of extermination against "the sculking, bloody, mischievous, villianous" Indians.¹⁸ Some owned slaves and, though both sides promised freedom to the servants and slaves of their opponents during Bacon's Rebellion, neither side proposed releasing or freeing their own servants and slaves. Yet the Isle of Wight petitioners with whom this article began faced both ways: demanding that men be taxed according to landholding yet arguing, if that proved impossible, that all men pay the same tax or no tax. To understand how and why these two languages of class coexisted, one needs to examine more closely the material interests in which they were grounded.

On March 5, 1677, the Virginia House of Burgesses received a statement of twenty-six grievances written on behalf of "the poore yet his Majes[ty's] most Loyall subjects of the Isle of Wight countie." Seven signatures were attached to the original petition and someone, probably Samuel Wiseman, clerk of the house, annotated the list with brief character sketches of most:

Richard Penny, A very busy man in these tymes.
John Marshall.

¹⁸ For a general discussion of the relationship between rights and privileges in this period, see Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge, 1979). The Indians were described as "sculking" in "The Virginians Plea for Opposing the Indians without the Governour's Order," in Egerton ms. 2395, fol. 545, British Library.

Richard Sharpe.

Richard Jord[a]n, Senior, One of Bacon's Representatives.

Edward Miller, A harmless poor man.

John ‡ Davis. One that hath bin in armes agt ye Governm't.

Antho Fulgham, A Busy pson that brought this paper to the rest to subscribe which was written by Marshall's Serv't att the desire of the subscribers hereof.

The document that Fulgham and Marshall organized claimed, "We rose . . . with intents to have our taxes Lowered . . . not . . . in any wayes of Rebellion against our most dreed Sovereaigne Lord the King." It highlighted the county's isolation. "Squire Bacon" was "a person whom we knew not nor . . . herd of" until he levied fifty-seven men from the county. Governor William Berkeley "and all the great men" had gone away "whither wee know not and left us as sheep without a shepherd to the mercy of the heathen, yet under the comand of Nathaniel Bacone." It also castigated the local caudillo, Colonel Joseph Bridger, questioning the whereabouts of a "great bank of mony" that Bridger, in his capacity as customs collector for the lower James River, had acquired.¹⁹

Isle of Wight's petition was not unusual in rehearsing a mixture of local and colonial complaints. It developed its general grievances, however, in particularly arresting terms. The ninth grievance, for instance, stated, "The more to encourage the Indians against us they have sent severall of them out armed to look after our Christian Neighbours who are gone somewhere to secure themselves." This grievance, protesting the use of Indians to track down servants and slaves who had taken Bacon's oath to secure their freedom and subsequently fled to the south-

¹⁹ The petition is repr. in *VMHB* 2, no. 4 (April 1895): 380–92 (quotations, 380–81). An unsigned copy of the petition of the poor yet loyal inhabitants of Isle of Wight County, with brief comments by the royal commissioners, can be found in C.O. 1/39, fol. 229. The petition also appears in *VMHB* 2: 392. Penny signed the grievances, the subsequent confession made in open court, and numerous other legal transactions with a mark. Colonel Joseph Bridger was the richest man in Isle of Wight County. At his death in 1686, he owned at least ninety-five-hundred acres in Isle of Wight and his house, Whitemarsh, was the largest in the county. From abroad he exploited an extensive kin network in the county to establish a profitable trade in wine and general merchandise before moving permanently to Virginia soon after the Restoration. He also served as a burgess from 1662 to 1670 and on the Council from 1673 to 1686. Nineteenth-century Argentinean writer Domingo F. Sarmiento coined the term caudillo to describe Indian-fighting frontier potentates opposed to the expansion of democratic government (see Sarmiento, *Life in the Argentine Republic in the Days of the Tyrants; Or, Civilization and Barbarism*, trans. Mrs. Horace [Mary] Mann [1868; repr., New York, 1960]). Though obviously anachronistic, I believe the term captures the self-conception of men such as Bridger.

side to avoid Berkeley's retribution, was unique and truly incendiary. It might reflect the input of indentured servants who had taken advantage of Bacon's offer. The petition's thirteenth grievance is equally striking: "Also wee desire that ther may be a continuall warr with the Indians that we may have once have done with them." The petition demanded in its sixteenth grievance "that evrie man may be taxed according to the tracks of Land they hold" and, as described previously, by using the trope of the man with a wife and children to protect the poor yet loyal subjects of Isle of Wight claimed equality with "those who have wealth and honor."²⁰

Colonel Bridger in Isle of Wight County not only disputed the specific allegations made against him but also counterattacked by persuading seventy-one of "His Majesties Loyall Subjects in the Upper Parish of Isle of Wight County" to seek "protection against the said writing, or Pretended Grievances." These petitioners denounced the document submitted by the Fulgham-Marshall group as the product of "Envy, Emulation, Malice, and Ignorance." Bridger's was a more measured response than that of his counterpart, Colonel Edward Hill, the appointed president of Charles City County, who expressed his contempt for the petitioning process by ensuring that a statement of grievances filed by his constituents was discovered, soaking up gravy, beneath a pie at a lavish dinner at which he served up plundered food. Nevertheless Bridger was determined to reestablish his authority within the county. On March 16, 1677, Marshall, whose servant had apparently written the petition organized by Fulgham, begged on his knees for forgiveness from the Isle of Wight County court for the great contempt expressed, scandal caused, and obloquy incurred by his "rash" allegations to the royal commissioners. On March 27, 1677, Marshall, his cosigners, and two other men, Ambrose Bennett and James Bagnall, acknowledged in court that the paper they had signed was "false and scandalous" and that they could prove no portion of it. They undertook to never again "be guilty of ye like mutinous and rebellious practices."²¹

²⁰ As late as October 1677, the House of Burgesses noted that "several rebels," afraid of punishment, were hiding in the woods of the southside. The burgesses authorized a bounty of five thousand pounds of tobacco for any rebel brought in dead or alive (see "At an Assembly, October 10, 1677," in *Coventry Papers*, fol. 90 [vol. 78, reel 18]). For the Isle of Wight petition, see *VMHB* 2: 380–92 (quotations, 388, 380, 390).

²¹ Joseph Bridger's petition is repr. in Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight County*, 158–61 (quotations, 158–60). For Edward Hill's treatment of the Charles City Co. petition, see "Deposition of Thomas Mallory, Aged 40 years," in *C.O.* 1/40, fol. 231. When the inhabitants of Charles City finally succeeded in submitting their grievances in their own voice, Edward Hill sponsored a motion in the Virginia House of Burgesses that called for the "author" of the "humble remonstrance" to be

Who were these men? What motivated them and to what did they aspire? What did it mean to be poor yet loyal? Penny (the busy man) owned land enough to bequeath on his death in 1693 to his son-in-law, Robert Marshall, "that land known as Penny's Point where Robert Marshall has a house" and to his eldest son, William Penny, "the rest of my land." The remainder of Penny's bequests to his sons, daughters, and grandchildren consisted of household items, including pewterware, a feather bed, "my great Bible," and livestock. Though he was at best semiliterate, Penny was retained as the attorney of James Easton, "Citizen and Goldsmith of Bristol [England]." John Marshall's will, proved June 9, 1688, left to his eldest son, Humphrey, the seven-hundred-acre "plantation" where "he now lives." (This tract adjoined cosigner Fulgham's land.) Marshall bequeathed to his youngest son, Robert (William Penny's son-in-law), some other land near the "Long Swamp" and to his wife sundry household goods and a herd of hogs. Sharpe died while apparently residing on land leased from the estate of Arthur Smith. His bequests were modest: a silver spoon, pewterware, a spinning wheel, and a boar by the name of Nancy. Richard Jordan Senior, a burgess in the June 1676 assembly, was the son of a former burgess and a kinsman of Colonel George Jordan of Surry, an attorney general of Virginia. Though not a Quaker himself, Jordan was closely related to prominent southside Quakers. He owned land near Cypress Swamp. Miller may well have been the harmless poor man Wiseman described. He died intestate soon after 1678. Davis is an opaque figure whose name makes him virtually impossible to identify in court records.²²

punished for presenting a "highly scandalous and injurious" document (see "At an Assembly, October 10, 1677," in *Coventry Papers*, fol. 90 [vol. 78, reel 18]). Thomas Grendon alleged that Hill had substituted an entirely new set of grievances, written in his own hand, purporting to represent the sentiments of the inhabitants of Charles City (see "Copy of Mr. Grendon's Information supplied to the General Court, March 1678," in C.O. 1/42, fols. 102–3). See also *VMHB* 3: 240. For court proceedings, see *Isle of Wight County Record of Wills, Deeds, Etc.*, vol. 1, 1662–1715, 351.

²² For Richard Penny's will, see *Isle of Wight County Record of Wills, Deeds, Etc.*, vol. 2, 1661–1719, 344–45. For his agreement with Easton, *ibid.*, vol. 1, 1662–1715, 23–24. James Easton's son retained Penny's services following the death of his father in 1666 (*ibid.*, 85). For John Marshall's will, see *Isle of Wight County Record of Wills, Deeds, Etc.*, vol. 2, 1661–1719, 279. For Richard Sharpe's will, *ibid.*, 422. In 1679 Richard Jordan Sr. gave over to his son John one hundred acres near Cypress Swamp (Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight County*, 581). On the Jordan family, see "Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents," *VMHB* 3, no. 2 (October 1895): 186; *VMHB* 4, no. 1 (July 1896): 3; "Isle of Wight County Records," *WMQ*, 1st ser., 7, no. 4 (April 1899): 231. It is possible that John Davis switched sides. A

By contrast Fulgham, that busy person, is easily identifiable as a prominent man in his community. Like the Bridgers, the Fulghams were an armigerous family comfortably situated in England. In 1664 Fulgham's father, Captain Anthony Fulgham, received the patent to one thousand acres in Isle of Wight County due to him for the importation of twenty people. The following year he became a justice and was granted a further sixteen hundred acres for the importation of thirty people. This latter grant made the Fulghams John Marshall's nearest neighbors. It is possible that the Fulghams and the Marshalls sought to build or transplant a community of Puritan coreligionists. The Fulgham family certainly owned slaves and on the death of Captain Anthony Fulgham Senior divided the estate in a manner that separated a slave woman named Joan from her child.²³

Two men, Bagnall and Bennett, did not sign the list of grievances received by the House of Burgesses yet acknowledged in open court being "subscribers" to it. These two men owned adjoining tracts of land and had endured a delayed inheritance. Bagnall's father, Roger, who served at least one term in the House of Burgesses, died in 1646 before James Bagnall had reached the age of majority, leaving to his heir "the plantation I now live in . . . when he is of age to enjoy it." It appears that the younger Bagnall, who described himself as a "planter," struggled

John Davis was among the signers of the petition of rebuttal organized by Colonel Bridger (see Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight County*, 158–61, esp. 160).

²³ Anthony Fulgham's will employed a devotional formula—"I give my soul to God from whom I received it being in sure and certain hopes of a Glorious Resurrection in Jesus Christ my Redeemer"—seldom used in Isle of Wight County (see Isle of Wight County Record of Wills, Deeds, Etc., vol. 2, 1661–1719, 168–69). The county's indefatigable antiquarian, John Bennett Boddie, suggests, on the basis of a minute examination of land grants and passenger lists, that John Marshall and Fulgham sought to transport families and individuals who shared Puritan values (see Boddie, *Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight County*). Slaves were the subject of a number of complicated transactions within the Fulgham family. Captain Anthony Fulgham Sr., a former justice, died in 1669, leaving his house and the land on which he lived to his son, John (Isle of Wight County Record of Wills, Deeds, Etc., vol. 1, 1662–1715, 196–97). Soon afterward John Fulgham, "for diverse good causes and valuable considerations . . . and also out of brotherly love," acknowledged in open court that it was the "desire" of his late father that his brother, Anthony Fulgham Jr., organizer of the petition, "should wholly have and enjoy his Negro woman called Joan after my mother's decease." John, therefore, renounced all claims to Joan. At the same time and for the same reason, he renounced all claims to Joan's child in favor of another brother, Nicholas, thereby separating Joan from her child (*ibid.*, 197–98). Anthony Fulgham Jr. died in 1678. He left his remaining goods and "crops now made" to his dear mother "for the purchasing of servants or others as she thinks fit" (*ibid.*, vol. 2, 1661–1719, 168–69).

to improve the plantation bequeathed him. On the eve of Bacon's Rebellion, Bagnall sold the hundred-acre "land and plantation" where he dwelled, first reserving to himself "ye use and benefit of ye sd land . . . for 3 years . . . [and] liberty to take & carry off ye sd land the [sic] nursery of young trees that is thereon not making any wilful waste." Bagnall sought to transplant his young trees to lands in the vicinity of Cypress Swamp. He appears to have died poor but uncommonly well read. An appraisal of his estate made reference to his great Bible and sixty "old books," as well as a violin, two spinning wheels, and a pair of old pistols.²⁴

Bennett was a neighbor of Penny and Bagnall. His father, also named Ambrose, was transported to Isle of Wight County by the future governor of Virginia, Richard Bennett (no relation), in or soon before the summer of 1635. The older Ambrose Bennett was probably a clerk rather than a laboring servant because he almost immediately began claiming head rights in Isle of Wight for transporting servants. He died sometime between 1650 and 1657, before his son had reached the age of majority. At that time his estate encompassed more than one thousand acres of land and included livestock and servants. Bennett's cosigner, John Marshall, offered security that the estate would be managed in the younger Bennett's best interests by an executor. When Bennett came into his estate, however, Marshall and another signer, Sharpe, extracted from him indemnities protecting them from any lawsuits arising from the administration of the estate. The younger Bennett died in 1680. His estate contained one slave woman, livestock, two swarms of bees, a spinning wheel, and bills due him to the value of 7,097 pounds of tobacco.²⁵

²⁴ Isle of Wight County Record of Wills, Deeds, Etc., vol. 1, 1662–1715, 369. Roger Bagnall's will, Oct. 19, 1647, Isle of Wight County Deeds, Wills, Guardian's Account Book A, 1636–1767, fols. 12–13; Isle of Wight County Record of Wills, Deeds, Etc., vol. 1, 1662–1715, 310–11; *ibid.*, vol. 2, 1661–1719, 450–51.

²⁵ Richard Bennett, future governor of Virginia, came to the colony in or about 1628 to take over the management of his uncle Edward Bennett's Welcome plantation. Edward was an extremely powerful London merchant, a former auditor of the Virginia Company of London, and the author of the mercantilist pamphlet *A Treatise in Three Parts* (1623). Richard became a burgess from Warrosquyoake (future Isle of Wight) as early as 1629. He eventually patented more than seven thousand acres in the county and was responsible for bringing in six hundred settlers, many of them Puritans (see J. Frederick Fausz, "Bennett, Richard," in *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, 1: 445–47). Prior to his death, Ambrose Bennett Sr. appointed William Westuray as his son's guardian and entrusted Westuray to manage the estate until his son and heir reached the age of majority. Westuray died before Bennett turned twenty-one and the estate was administered by Westuray's widow, Elizabeth, who in 1665 turned over to Bennett "all things" belonging to it,

The legal records that paint a partial portrait of this particular group supply ample evidence of distinctions within it and of individual and sometimes conflicting interests. The group's interests offer the main explanation for the content of their remonstrance, though the manner of its composition was also important. Wiseman's ambiguous statement that the document was written by Marshall's servant holds open the possibility that the group's poorer members did more than simply subscribe to it. While Fulgham took the petition around and Marshall's servant wrote it up, the poor yet loyal chipped in as they saw fit. Davis spoke on behalf of runaways; others returned to the question of taxation in terms borrowed almost verbatim from "Considerations Upon the Present Troubles in Virginia."²⁶ Nevertheless contemporaries identified and punished Fulgham and Marshall as the primary instigators of the Isle of Wight petition. It is easy to imagine that the wealthier members of this small group, particularly Fulgham and Marshall, thought of themselves as possessing interests and rights distinct from those of Davis or that harmless poor man Edward Miller.

Though they accepted a rhetorical appeal to the rights of an undifferentiated class of poor yet loyal householders, Marshall, Fulgham, and Bennett were also conscious that their status within the county rested partly on prior service to the public, as it did for that "middle layer of county society" identified by Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman in Middlesex County. Their worldview was shaped by their shared experience of dealing with those once-powerful men who were the county's founding fathers—including Richard Bennett, Ambrose Bennett Senior, Anthony Fulgham Senior, Richard Jordan Senior, Captain John Upton, and Captain Roger Bagnall—and their disgust at the cupidity of the county's current caudillo, Bridger. (The language of the second grievance, with its metaphor of the shepherdless flock, is suggestive here, as is the reference to "Squire" Bacon.) They possessed and defended distinct attitudes toward property. Fulgham had no qualms about separating an

including "horses, mares, cattle, household stuff, housing" and an "orchard." In this context the younger Bennett entered into agreements with Elizabeth Westuray, John Marshall, and Richard Sharpe, protecting them from lawsuits arising from William Westuray's administration of the estate (see *Isle of Wight County Record of Wills, Deeds, Etc.*, vol. 2, 1661–1719, 55–56, 214–15).

²⁶ In some counties, typically those to the south and west of the prime tidewater tobacco lands, postrebellion petitions of grievance were drawn up during or immediately after mass meetings. In the richer tidewater counties, grantees tended to write up what they took to be the grievances of the populace, sometimes claiming to have canvassed opinion, sometimes not.

enslaved mother from her child and ensured that his will granted his mother the ability to purchase "servants and others."²⁷ Marshall's demand that his neighbor Bennett indemnify him against lawsuits that might arise from the administration of Bennett's estate by his guardian is equally suggestive of a finely tuned consciousness of individual interests. They may have been coreligionists (all nine subscribers resided within the same parish), struggled to diversify away from tobacco production by, for example, planting orchards, and were prepared to describe fugitives from justice as Christian neighbors, yet it is hard to imagine that Marshall or Fulgham ultimately believed themselves members of an undifferentiated collectivity of households in which Askew, Davis, or Miller were numbered among the poor yet loyal on terms of equality.

Class-inflected discussions of the commonalty and the rights of householders suggest an alternative to paradigms in which cultural forces such as Puritanism or racism fully and sufficiently explain the existence of collective consciousness in seventeenth-century America (insofar as historians of the period are prepared to accept that such collective consciousness existed at all). A close examination of the Isle of Wight remonstrance and the material interests of its subscribers suggests that, at least by 1677, property holders who were attempting to diversify beyond producing as much tobacco as possible conceived of themselves as a class distinct from both poorer, often landless, neighbors and the landed grandees who were the erstwhile lords of their locales. That men such as Marshall and Fulgham sometimes chose to present themselves as members of an apparently undifferentiated commonalty alongside Davis or Miller does not diminish either the significance of this class's emergence or the interpretive possibilities bound up with that emergence, as a brief concluding tour of political consciousness in the period suggests.

As any number of historians of seventeenth-century England have recounted, "radicalism" did not simply evaporate with the Restoration. The concept of commonalty, for example, received one last infusion of energy through the hand of John Milton, who in 1660 published *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*. The editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* credit Milton's pamphlet with the last recorded English usage of commonalty as a synonym for a self-governing polity or commonwealth. The specific citation is to Milton's argument

²⁷ Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650–1750* (New York, 1984), 143 (quotation, 151); "Anthony Fulgham's Will, Proved December 9, 1678," in *Isle of Wight Record of Wills, Deeds, Etc.*, vol. 2, 1661–1719, fols. 168–69. For "Squire" Bacon, see *VMHB* 2: 381.

that a commonwealth could be best and soonest obtained "if every County in the Land were made a kind of subordinate Commonalty or Commonwealth." Milton offered a carefully qualified defense of republicanism. The English had originally covenanted to protect the King's "*Person and Authority, in the preservation of the true Religion, and our Liberties.*" When Charles I abused this covenant, the result had been civil war and a commonwealth. If Charles II attempted similar abuses, argued Milton, the advancement "of every person according to his merit" and the continued enjoyment of civil rights would necessitate the creation of commonalties based on existing English counties. In county towns the nobility and chief gentry might make their own laws and enforce them by their own elected judicatures, so that with "law executed fully and finally in thir own Counties and Precincts, long wish'd and spoken of, but never yet obtain'd; they shall have none then to blame but themselves, if it be not well administer'd."²⁸

Milton also defiantly described the attractions of a commonwealth: "of all governments a Commonwealth aims most to make the people flourishing, vertuous, noble and high spirited." Commonwealths encouraged the every man to advance his own lot through trade or commerce. Monarchs, in contrast, might aim to make the people well fleeced, but only "for thir own shearing, and for the supply of regal prodigalitie." Thus, in Milton's hands, the county commonalty was very nearly synonymous with a commonwealth. The commonalty could exist within a monarchy where the king was attentive to its needs. The needs of the commonwealth, however, were more likely to be protected and advanced within a republic.²⁹

²⁸ For discussions of radical thought after the collapse of the Protectorate, see, for example, Gary S. De Krey, "Radicals, Reformers and Republicans: Academic Language and Political Discourse in Restoration London," in *A Nation Transformed: England after the Restoration*, ed. Alan Houston and Steve Pincus (Cambridge, 2001), 71–99 ("radicalism," 71); Tim Harris, "Understanding Popular Politics in Restoration Britain," *ibid.*, 125–53. *The Works of John Milton in Verse and Prose . . .*, ed. John Mitford (London, 1851), 5: 420–54 (quotations, 421, 449). J[ohn] M[ilton], *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth . . .* (London, 1660), 16 ("law executed fully and finally").

²⁹ Whether these ideas had any broader constituency or influence in seventeenth-century England has been the subject of heated debate. Alan Everitt has suggested that, in the first half of the seventeenth century, English counties functioned as quasi-autonomous polities. Everitt's study of Kent goes so far as to suggest that its ancient families possessed what amounted to their own ideology. Everitt argues that "in many respects, despite its ancient centralized government, the England of 1640 resembled a union of partially independent county-states or communities, each with its own distinct ethos and loyalty" (Everitt, *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion, 1640–60* [Leicester, Eng., 1966], 13). On the question of whether the ancient families of Kent possessed a unique ideology, *ibid.*, 45–55. These

Milton's argument had a force and logic that was absent from the Virginia usage of commonalty. By addressing the Dutch States-General and the city-states of ancient Greece, Milton discussed how local polities could be bound into a federal structure. Bacon's Rebellion produced no document of comparable sophistication. Yet it produced something equally significant: a veritable explosion of political assertion from Virginia's several counties that took as its unit of analysis precisely that local self-governing commonalty celebrated by Milton.

The inhabitants of Henrico County demanded that six members of the commonalty witness and approve the local levies so that, to borrow Milton's words, "they shall have none . . . to blame but themselves, if it [the law] be not well administer'd." Bacon's various declarations and others' postrebellion petitions of grievance complained that William Berkeley had advanced favorites to positions of power not only because such action was corrupt but also because in Virginia's many localities the likes of John Marshall and Anthony Fulgham sought equality with, on the grounds of their moral superiority over, the "jugling parasites" who occupied positions "rich in honor." Milton argued that commonwealths encouraged individuals to advance through trade or commerce according to their abilities. In 1677 Lancaster County petitioned that for the "encouragement of trade, wherein the Wealth of the . . . Country doth consist," an assize of meat be established in their county because "the Islanders" of the West Indies buy "greate quantities of flour and meate for their slaves." Despite a scarcity of provisions in Virginia caused by the rebellion, freeholders of Lancaster sought their own advancement. Some evidence suggests that even Virginians who might have found themselves injured by this logic accepted its premise, as when Northampton County's petitioners accepted that, even when the community was protected from "Ingross[ers]," the rich would still be able to buy more than the poor. The lengths to which individual localities were willing to push the cause of local advancement are striking. In a demand that the royal commissioners found "wholly mutinous," Lower Norfolk County's petitioners claimed the right to ship tobacco to any English colony without paying duties.³⁰

claims have been vigorously contested, not least by Clive Holmes, "The Community in Stuart Historiography," *Journal of British Studies* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 54-73. Milton, *Readie and Easie Way*, 17.

³⁰ For Milton's defense of republics, see Milton, *Readie and Easie Way*, 16-17. Lancaster County Grievances, in C.O. 1/39, fol. 217. On the lack of foodstuffs in the colony and its general state in the aftermath of the rebellion, see [Francis] Moryson and [Sir John] Berry to Sir Henry Coventry, Feb. 2, 1677, in Coventry Papers, fol.

Through the petitions' relentless localism, Virginians espoused independence but not necessarily Independence and republican values rather than republican ideology. That local agency couched in such implicitly republican terms could mean different things to different groups of men enhanced rather than diminished its appeal for Virginians. It was a protean force. A month before Nathaniel Bacon's death, John Coode put it to him that his followers thought of themselves as Indian fighters rather than rebels against royal authority. Bacon replied, "But I think otherwise; and am confident of it, that it is in the mind of this Country, and of Maryland & Carolina also, to cast off their Governours[.] And the Governours of Carolina have taken no notice of the people, nor the people of them [for] a long time and the people are resolved to own their Governour no farther; and if we cannot prevail by our arms at least to make our conditions for peace; *or obtaine the privilege to elect our owne Governours*, we may retire to Roanoke."³¹ The last group of rebels to surrender, those Christian neighbors to whom the Isle of Wight petitioners referred, were establishing something akin to a maroon community on the southern frontier of the colony. The burghers of Lower Norfolk County who demanded free trade in 1677 were better equipped to enact visions of independence than the remnants of Bacon's army. As discussions of regional variations within Virginia's economy and their place within an Atlantic economy achieve yet greater sophistication, differing visions of independence and the class consciousness associated with them may well come into sharper focus. In any event the demonstrable recrudescence of a language of commonalty and the emergence of a language of

366 (vol. 76, reel 16). April Lee Hatfield gives a fine account of this trade relationship in Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia, 2004). For Northampton County's trade proposal and Lower Norfolk's demands, see *VMHB* 2: 292, 170.

³¹ [John Coode], "The Full Substance of a Discourse Nathaniel Bacon Deceased proposed to me on or about the 2nd of September Last," in Coventry Papers, fols. 347–48 (vol. 77, reel 16) [emphasis added]. Coode was a member of Maryland's House of Delegates who had been sent to investigate the rebellion. Assessing the credibility of Coode's account, Stephen Saunders Webb concludes, "It seems . . . that Coode fairly described his discussion with Bacon about the external aspects of the Virginian's revolution against English authority" (Webb, 1676, 79–80 [quotation, 80]). For a discussion of Coode's career, see David W. Jordan, "John Coode, Perennial Rebel," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 70, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 1–28. In February 1677 the royal commissioners sent to investigate the rebellion reported that the "humour" of the people was "sullen" and "obstinate" and that there was a risk that some Virginians would abandon their plantations and "away to other parts" ([Francis] Moryson and [Sir John] Berry to Sir Henry Coventry, Feb. 9, 1677, in Coventry Papers, fol. 389 [vol. 76, reel 16]).

rights in seventeenth-century Virginia are subjects that demand investigation on their own terms and not on those that have come to dominate the field, namely the search for the origins of eighteenth-century Virginia's slave society. Whiteness within the slaveholding society that Virginia became in the eighteenth century did not always, or perhaps even often, trump class identities formed in the seventeenth century.